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Thank you for the opportunity to come before you to address the benefits of the Delmarva Conservation Corridor. The hallmarks of the Delmarva are the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays, and their tributaries, good soils, rich marshlands, and a landscape teeming with wildlife. These resources are the foundation from which our local culture emerged. Today they remain the foundation of our economy and are the very essence of our character. Spread among this special working landscapes, are our towns - some of which are architectural jewels, while others retain their agricultural and utilitarian charm. Our region is a place where the colonial footprint is still visible and the residents are still connected to the land and water. Delmarva is one of the last truly special landscapes in the Mid-Atlantic.

However, growth in our region poses a serious threat to this special landscape and those whose livelihood depends on its natural resources. The American Farmland Trust has identified parts of this region as one of the top ten threatened agricultural regions in the United States. Sprawling residential and commercial developments are slowly eroding our residential base, an asset that can never be replaced. Not only does sprawl directly affect agriculture by consuming land, but indirectly affects the farmland that remains. Agriculture is not always compatible with nearby homes and non-farm neighbors make it more difficult to farm by objecting to the noise, odor, and dust associated with farming. According to the Census of Agriculture the six Mid and Upper Shore regions, where Kent County is located, has lost more than 60,000 acres of farmland since 1987. The median farm size continues to decrease indicating a trend toward hobby or martini farms. Since 1990, the Upper Eastern Shore of Maryland (Kent, Queen Anne's, Cecil, Caroline, and Talbot Counties) regions' population has increased by more than 25,000 people. Development pressure on the area continues to increase. Small towns are facing development which will double or triple the size of the towns when completed. Large green field developments consisting of hundreds of lots are proposed throughout the Shore. Well over 7500 lots are currently proposed in the region at this time.

Counties on the Eastern Shore of Maryland have taken strong steps to reverse this trend through a diverse set of programs aimed to preserve farmland and natural areas, curb sprawl, and increase the profitability of farming in the region. The presence Delmarva Conservation Corridor Program has enabled this effort to reach new heights. For the first time, Kent County has included monies from its general fund to purchase agricultural easement and most of the other Counties are considering similar funding. This is a direct result of the funds earmarked for Delmarva Conservation Corridor in the Federal Farm and Ranch Land Conservation Program.

This is just the beginning of the potential of the Delmarva Conservation Corridor. Many Counties in the region are identifying those farmland necessary for the continuance of agriculture in the region and are targeting programs toward those farms. Others are identifying natural areas of special significance. Private land trust and other not for profit environmental groups have increased their activity in the area. In its first year, the Delmarva Conservation Corridor has served as an impetus for numerous programs and activities in the region that is limited only by funding.